

THE DEDICATION OF THE FESTSPIELHAUS IN SALZBURG

For Release: at will

When the Festspielhaus was dedicated on July 26th of this year it immediately became the heart of the Salzburg Festival. Its opening not only fulfilled a long dream, but celebrated as well the fortieth anniversary of the founding of these Festivals. "Art in Austria is a RES PUBLICA," declared the Austrian Minister of Education in his dedication speech, meaning art is something which belongs to and comes from the life of the people. This phrase never seemed more true than in the festivities surrounding the dedication of this great theatre.

Tucked in among sharply rising hills on both sides of the swiftly flowing Salzach, Salzburg is a Baroque city with squares and gardens, wonderful churches, houses, and palaces. A castle dominates the city from above. The towers and domes of her churches crowd in bewildering number and complexity. Even the hills have been cut away to gain necessary breathing space. Here - tight against a rocky wall with a sharply rising precipice - is the new theatre, with an eighteenth century facade including a doorway by the great architect Fischer von Erlach.

The dedication of the Festspielhaus is an important part of the Austrian Republic's program to build anew an expression of the inner life of Austria. In the past year many palaces and churches have been restored after the destructions of war years. The newly built Vienna Opera was reopened in 1956. Two years ago the dome of the Salzburg Cathedral, destroyed by a senseless bomb, was rededicated. The new theatre is truly magnificent, with every technical device imaginable. Its dedication triumphantly affirms the strength and continuity of Austrian theatrical and musical life.

Distinguished visitors from the entire world gave the event international importance. It was a privilege for an American and a Cleveland to be present and have all doors opened to him by the magic name of George Szell, a name to conjure with in Salzburg as it is in Cleveland. Clevelanders can realize what The Cleveland Museum of Art and the Cleveland Orchestra mean to a comparatively new city. Music

and art have played a fundamental part in the life of Austria for centuries. The world is its debtor.

The Archbishop of Salzburg, Dr. Clemens Roracher, opened the festivities with a Pontifical High Mass in Salzburg's Cathedral (the first great baroque cathedral north of the Alps), built by the Italian architect Santino Solari. The music of Salzburg's famous son Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart raised the Mass to a mystical beauty. The music and the eloquent words of the Archbishop rededicated Salzburg and her theatre to things of the spirit.

Later in the day the President of Austria, Dr. Adolfsohrf, Ministers, and others added their words on the significance of the occasion. The entire dedication was brought to a climax with the Gloria from the C Minor Mass of Mozart directed by Herbert von Karajan with the Vienna Orchestra, the Choir of the Vienna Opera, and soloists of the first order. As an American I was particularly proud that the leading soprano part was sung by the American Negro Leontyne Price, who in the past year has made a place for herself in the musical world of Europe.

The crowning event was the first presentation in the Festspielhaus that evening. A gala event of first importance, Herbert von Karajan had chosen the gay and sprightly opera the Rosenkavalier by Richard Strauss. He had not wanted to present a Mozart opera until the acoustics of the new hall had been fully tried. He need not have worried for they proved to be perfect.

In another sense the decision was right -- for the author of the libretto, Hugo von Hofmanstall, and of the musical score, Richard Strauss, had been among those who brought the Salzburg Festival into being. They had worked with Max Reinhardt whose production of Jedermann is part of the Salzburg Festival every year. Reinhardt also staged here the first presentation of The Miracle which played for one week in Cleveland's Public Hall during a triumphant world tour.

Reinhardt, von Hofmanstall, and Strauss helped lay the foundations of the Festival. So with the Rosenkavalier these names were associated with the inaugural

festivities. The effective baroque stage settings of Teo Otto brilliantly brought to life the happy times of the great Empress Maria Theresa.

Three great singers - Lisa della Casa the Feldsarschallin, Sena Jurinac the Octavian, and Hilda Guden the Sophie - gave performances that ranked among the most brilliant presentations of this opera ever given.

Although the facade of the Festspielhaus retains original baroque elements, the interior is completely modern throughout, brought to a successful conclusion by the architect Clemens Holzmeister. Associated with him were many painters, sculptors in marble and metal, ceramists, weavers of tapestries designed by Kokoscha and others.

The interior theatre expresses the force of modern art in Austria. This catholicity of taste and acceptance of a forward-looking present is evidence of the creative spirit of Austria and of Salzburg. No expense was spared to make this theatre the last word in technical efficiency. The lighting system is highly elaborate, capable of every variation needed. The acoustics are admirable - as mentioned earlier.

Broad and curving rows of seats, curving loges, and the curving balcony assure the essential intimacy between stage and audience. Each member of an audience of 2400 has been considered. The quiet color scheme includes bland wood, ceiling and proscenium of warm grey, a reddish curtain with hints of lavender, lavender seat upholstery, and pale blue carpeting. Blond wooden seatbacks unite the entire scheme.

Particularly admirable and necessary in a European theatre are the ample lobbies on three floors with easily accessible salons with discreetly handled buffets where the audience can stroll or seek refreshment during the long entreacts. Art works are an accent and decoration in all of these salons.

The entire series of events had been opened the preceding night with a brilliant reception given by the President of Austria at Schloss Klesheim. But Salzburg herself provided the final tableau. The towers and domes of the Cathedral, churches, fountains, and the castle above gleamed with an almost incandescent light. Here was Salzburg - the northern Rome - the Mozart city - true to her past and to her living present - the incomparable frame in which the Festival is set.

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